

Many Routes to Meaning

*Children's language and
literacy learning in
creative arts projects*

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What are favourable contexts for children's language and literacy development in creative arts projects in schools?

Are there underlying patterns across creative arts forms?

What is appropriate assessment of this work?

- A context and way of working

that enabled children to

- Engage in wide-ranging forms of talk
- Return to and explore themes in different modes
- Have opportunities for different forms of symbolising or representation

The 'workshop', apprenticeship

Activity, doing, making

Independence, 'getting on with it'

High standards, no targets

Purpose

Shared vision of children and how they learn

Professional relationships

"My intention is to go there and create as much pleasure and joy as possible, to make something fun and memorable."

(Arts partner)

For teachers...

- Being the bridge between the artists and the children
- 'Becoming small'
- Taking part, joining in
- Explaining activities, making them comprehensible
- Modelling to the arts partner how to talk to children
- Clarify arts partner's meaning to children
- Helping individuals and groups
- Ensuring fairness, calming squabbles
- Thinking about the 'lead up' and preparation
- Making it easier for the project to succeed
- Using knowledge of individual children to deploy additional resources or support
- Extending the work and children's learning from the experience

What constitutes 'work' in the classroom?

Learning skills, language, concepts

Using these to make something new

"How is he supposed to look? Happy? He looks sad. You have to choose the right shots, you have to act well, you have to prepare the actions: 'Action!'

I could put the pictures in a different order. If you change the order, you change the story. This is called editing. Editors are special people who put together bits of film.

This one has a series of close ups and a reaction shot. We call that suspense."

"Can you get to your starting point from last week?"

Make sure you do not go out of your working space.

Think about the quality of the noise in the dream sequence itself. You have to find a way to show a dream.

You need to have a clear finishing point, you can decide that in your group."

"He shows, he takes really quickly to show us how to do it, he's quick – da-da-da-da- -- and that's really good, that's how you do it, and we actually get on with it, and we do it.

...the thing I liked about him, he says – 'you can never get this wrong'."

(T, age 9)

"They trusted us. They showed us ONCE how to do something and then left us to go help some one else. Teachers – they don't ever leave you! 'Cos they're never sure if we can do it."

(S, age 11)

"They treat us like adults...like we know what to do."

(N, age 11)

"It made me feel like a proper person."

(K, age 9)

(What did she teach you?)

"The modelling. How to make newspaper roll-up muscles, and how to bend wires. And she taught us new words, words we are not familiar with that had to do with muscles. Long words. Contour. Anatomy. Tension. Tendon. Armature."

"Maybe when we go to secondary school we might come across those big words because in primary school you don't really learn big words like that... It was fun, and hard...She wanted all of us to be high-standard."

(D, age 10)

Talk

“We used to bully each other, but we know each other much better now.”

(Kiah, age 10)

Practical – doing and making, negotiating

Speculative – *How? What if?*

Companionable, relaxed and sociable

Imaginative, descriptive and empathetic

Reflective

Internalising the 'voice' of the artist

Sorry for talking long...

At least you're thinking.

So you're trying to tell us...

Can I just say something?

I think, this is a different one [idea]...

*Wouldn't it be better if we started it
this way?*

This is how I wish it would start...

Boy 1: Was there paint in the olden days?

Teacher: Yes, but it was always made from natural materials.

Girl 1: My mum has a farm in Portugal, she has one pig and the floor is all dirty.

Boy 1: When I went to Portugal, we had a pig, I was holding the legs, the rope broke, I had to throw the knife at him!

Teacher: What! You held a pig? Why were you doing that?

Boy 1: To kill him.

Teacher: Oh I don't know if I could do that.

Girl 2: My Nan has a donkey on her farm, behind her house she grows grapes. Everyone knows my Nan and me! One morning I got up early and picked grapes and corn.

Teacher: I love grapes.

(pupils aged 9 and 10)

Mia: I can't draw a tree. I have to draw a branch. These are the leaves. We did one smaller to this yesterday.

Sarah: You can't really see it [legs] because of the branches. It's hairy [bird], in fact it has fur all around it.

Bob: How many legs does a leopard have?

Sarah: Four. [continues drawing] Then a little bit of white.

Michaela: That looks a bit silly, I put the legs wrong. When you colour it in you won't see that bit.

(pupils aged 4 and 5)

**Returning to ideas and
themes
in
different
modes**

**Moving from talk to writing via different forms of
symbolising and 'drafting'**

Moving between worlds

Symbolic worlds in dance, painting, drawing

Worlds created in talk, in drama and in writing

Literature and story

“...it just comes, when you read, what you have to do. When you read, ideas just come into your head.” (K. Year 5)

"We had to think of a character that we wanted the chair for. We did an Alien chair, a Mermaid chair, a Harry Potter chair, a Baba Yaga Bony Legs chair – that one has chicken legs - a Giraffe chair – that one had a long back, for the long neck - , Goldilocks, James and the Giant Peach. We had to do things that matched the person [character]... An ordinary chair would be boring. Because you know the character, it's easy to know what to make it [the chair] like. You know what it's for. Even if it's a made-up chair."

(Daniella, age 11)

Louisa: When we were making the model, we would look back – leaf back – into the book to get ideas for what it could look like.

Sophie: When I'm in secondary school I will know how to use these tools and materials. And I'll remember the wonderful story – the most wonderful bit, our favourite bit – the candy river and garden. It's stuck in my head. Doing it helped with my writing, to get everything in, to describe everything.

Louisa: Instead of just saying 'there was trees and a river' now you say 'there was a gorgeous chocolate river and grass that melted like mint in your mouth.'

(pupils aged 11)

Confidence & Independence

"It was a proper, proper film like a video, like in Hollywood...I've never done anything like that, properly. It has helped me with understanding. I've learned new words cos we did quite a lot of reading. I'm better at my reading. I'm better at everything actually."

(H, age 9)

Experience

"When I went to see these plays and talked to the cast and did the lighting myself in the workshop, it made me think properly. The scriptwriter has to think about all those things. It changed my writing. I used to write 'once upon a time there was a girl' stories, quite imaginative stories. I thought about it a lot, and the stories that are actually something more interesting are about real life, everyday life."

(S, age 11)

Strategies

"Now I know how to make slip, to glaze and fire in the kiln. Our teacher was a professional. Now I have new ideas for every new thing I do. I don't just rely on my old ideas."

M, age 9 (was 8 yrs old in the art project)

"You read, you write, you act. You play [drama] games. It makes you better with having different partners, making new friends in class."

(K, age 9)

Knowledge & Understanding

"I learnt all the different shots – long, wide, cherry picker, bird's eye, close, - how the sound works, how to edit films. It was fun. I also learnt that using the microphone is hard work, standing and holding it. It takes a long time to make films.

I appreciate people that make long films now. What sort of things they did to make the shots, how to make the sound blend in, how to make it look good. You know how they made it, so that makes it seem better."

(B, age 10)

Reflection

"I just don't feel shy anymore. I feel like if I want to say something, I'll just say it and if I get it wrong then I might learn something."

(N, age 9)

"When I work now I try to imagine that [arts partner] T is gonna give it to somebody. It gives me – what's the word? – it gives me better writing. It begins with E – it influences me."

(T, age 10)

I love drawing. I feel like I'm going to another world.

When I write then I'm talking in my head, I'm looking at my work, I'm day dreaming and then I write again.